

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 CCO-00 /016 R

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DRAFTED BY S/S-O: DGAMBER:MDG

APPROVED BY S/S-O: JHOGANSON

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P 200206Z APR 76 ZFF4

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO USDEL SECRETARY PRIORITY

S E C R E T STATE 095235 TOSEC 100083

EXDIS

FOL REPEAT DAMASCUS 2394 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO

BEIRUT APR 19

QTE

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 2394

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PLO, US, XF

SUBJECT: MEETING OF SENATOR MATHIAS WITH PLO LEADER

YASSER ARAFAT

1. SUMMARY. MATHIAS AND AIDE TRAVELED TO BEIRUT FOR MIDNIGHT MEETING WITH ARAFAT APRIL 16-17. NO NEW GROUND WAS BROKEN, BUT ARAFAT DISCOURSED AT LENGTH ON LEBANON, MIDDLE EAST, PALESTINIANS, HIMSELF AS A "TERRORIST" AND U.S. POLICY. FULL MEMCON BEING POUCHED NEA. PLEASE FURNISH COPY TO SENATOR MATHIAS' OFFICE. END SUMMARY.

2. SEN. MATHIAS AND CODEL STAFF ROSSITER MET WITH PALESTINIAN LEADER ARAFAT, FARUQ QADDUMI AND SHAFIQ AL-HUT FOR TWO HOURS IN BEIRUT NIGHT OF APRIL 16-17. FOLLOWING SUBJECTS OF IMPORTANCE

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WERE COVERED.

3. LEBANON. ARAFAT SAID THAT CONSPIRACY EXISTED AGAINST LEBANON AND PALESTINIANS. IT WAS DESIGNED TO SHOW THAT SINCE LEBANON COULD NOT EXIST AS A SECULAR STATE NEITHER COULD THERE BE A SECULAR PALESTINE. SECOND GOAL OF CONSPIRACY, ARAFAT STATED, WAS TO RUIN LEBANON AS WINDOW TO WEST. MATHIAS TURNED CONVERSATION TO ISSUE OF SYRIAN INTERVENTION, OFFERING WORD OF WARNING THAT IF "SOME PREMATURE INCIDENT" WERE TO HAPPEN IN COMING 6-8 MONTHS, SUCH AS ISRAELI REACTION TO MASSIVE SYRIAN MILITARY INTERVENTION, US WOULD FEEL COMPELLED TO SIDE WITH ISRAEL. ARAFAT IMMEDIATELY AGREED SAYING THIS WAS WHAT HAD MOTIVATED HIM TO VISIT DAMASCUS PREVIOUS DAY. HE SAID HE THOUGHT HE HAD BEEN ABLE TO "DEFUSE THAT BOMB". HE ADMITTED NEVERTHELESS THAT THERE WAS SOME SYRIAN PRESENCE IN BEIRUT AND IN BORDER AREAS.

4. ARAFAT REFERRED TO LEBANESE CRISIS AS "VERY BAD DREAM". IT HELPED, HOWEVER, TO SHOW THAT PLO WAS NOT INTENT ON RULING LEBANON. DESPITE FACT THAT PLO CONTROLLED "EIGHTY PER CENT" OF LEBANON, HE CLAIMED, IT WAS ONLY TRYING TO RETURN POWER TO LEBANESE THEMSELVES SO THAT IT COULD GET ON WITH ITS OWN OBJECTIVE OF RETURNING TO ITS HOMELAND. IF NEW PRESIDENT COULD BE CHOSEN, ARAFAT SAID, 50 PER CENT OF PROBLEM WOULD BE SOLVED. FATAH, AS ONLY ORGANIZATION ABLE TO SPEAK TO ALL SIDES IN CONFLICT, WAS TRYING TO PROMOTE RECONCILIATION. HE ACCUSED CIA AND ISRAEL OF SUPPLYING ARMS TO CHRISTIAN RIGHT WING.

5. ARAFAT AS A TERRORIST. SEN MATHIAS COMMENTED THAT THOUGH ARAFAT TALKED LIKE A RESPONSIBLE MAN, MANY IN WORLD LOOKED ON HIM AS GANGSTER, ASSASSIN AND TERRORIST. QADDUMI ANSWERED THAT MOST OF WORLD HAD NOW ACCEPTED PLO AS LEGITIMATE REPRESENTATIVE OF PALESTINIANS. PLO, HE ASSERTED, WAS NOT COMMUNIST OR SOCIALIST OR RADICAL LEFTIST. IT WAS PURELY A NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT. AL-HUTT ADDED THAT MANY FREEDOM FIGHTERS, MAO AND HO CHI MINH FOR EXAMPLE, HAD BEEN ACCUSED OF BEING TERRORISTS. ARAFAT HIMSELF REPLIED THAT THOUGH HE HAD BEEN BORN IN JERUSALEM HE COULD NOT GO THERE. HE HAD FIVE BROTHERS AND SISTERS EACH LIVING IN A DIFFERENT COUNTRY. HIS HOME IN JERUSALEM, LIKE 19,000 OTHER

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HOMES IN PALESTINE IN LAST FIVE YEARS, HAD BEEN BLOWN UP. WHO IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, HE ASKED, WAS A TERRORIST.

6. MIDDLE EAST. ARAFAT SAID HE HAD BEEN ABLE TO CONVINCE PLO OF NECESSITY TO AGREE TO ESTABLISHMENT OF PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY "ON ANY LAND LIBERATED FROM ISRAEL BY FORCE OR OTHERWISE AS INTERIM MEASURE ON WAY TO JUST AND LASTING PEACE". PALESTINIAN REPLY TO RABIN'S STATEMENT THAT HE WOULD ONLY DEAL

WITH KING HUSSEIN HAD BEEN RECENT WEST MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN WHICH, HE ASSERTED, 87 PER CENT HAD VOTED IN FAVOR OF PLO REPRESENTATIVES. IN REPLY TO MATHIAS' QUESTION ON HOW MANY WOULD RETURN, QADDUMI SAID ABOUT 1.2 MILLION PALESTINIANS OUTSIDE ISRAEL WOULD HAVE RIGHT OF RETURN. ARAFAT INTERJECTED THAT PROBLEM WAS NOT ONE OF NUMBERS; WHILE SOME WOULD RETURN, MANY WOULD REMAIN ABROAD. QUESTION WAS ONE OF NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT ISSUE OF RECOGNITION HAD BEEN RAISED BY ISRAELIS AS DEVICE TO AVOID DEALING WITH PLO. MATHIAS REMARKED THAT WHILE ARAFAT APPEARED TO REPRESENT MODERATE ELEMENTS OF PLO THERE WERE CERTAINLY RADICAL ELEMENTS AS WELL. ARAFAT CONCURRED AND SAID HE TRIED TO CONTROL RADICAL ELEMENTS BUT IT WAS DIFFICULT BALANCING ACT. HE CLAIMED CREDIT FOR INHIBITING PALESTINIAN HIGHJACKINGS. IF HIS "MODERATE" APPROACH DID NOT ACHIEVE SUCCESS, HOWEVER, HE WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE ABLE TO CONTROL RADICALS INDEFINITELY.

7. U.S. POLICY.

IN CLOSING MINUTES, AL-HUT TOLD SENATOR THERE WAS ONE POINT HE JUST HAD TO GET OFF HIS CHEST. UNLIKE SOVIET UNION, WHOSE STRATEGY WAS WELL UNDERSTOOD, THE UNITED STATES HAD NO STRATEGIC POLICY TOWARD MIDDLE EAST, ONLY TACTICS AND PRAGMATIC DAY-TO-DAY DECISIONS WHICH WERE PROFESSIONAL AND EXPERT, BUT NEVERTHELESS ONLY TACTICS. THIS WEAKNESS SHOULD BE CORRECTED SO THAT ARABS AND ALSO ISRAELIS WOULD NOT MAKE INCORRECT ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT U.S. INTENTIONS. ARAFAT AND QADDUMI HAD NODDED AGREEMENT TO THESE REMARKS. SENATOR MATHIAS NOTED LATER TO EMBOFF THAT THIS HAD BEEN PORTION OF INTERVIEW WHICH HAD STOOD OUT AND IMPRESSED HIM THE MOST.

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8. DEPT PASS OTHER POSTS AS DESIRED.
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UNQTE
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TOSEC, CODELS, MEETINGS, POLITICAL LEADERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 APR 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GarlanWA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976STATE095235
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: O: DGAMBER:MDG
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760148-0500
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760442/aaaabjtz.tel
Line Count: 159
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GarlanWA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 MAR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <30 MAR 2004 by GarlanWA>; APPROVED <30 MAR 2004 by GarlanWA>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MEETING OF SENATOR MATHIAS WITH PLO LEADER YASSER ARAFAT
TAGS: PFOR, US, XF, PLO, (ARAFAT, YASSER), (MATHIAS, CHARLES)
To: SECRETARY
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006